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The United States and Paraguay: Focused on the Future

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My thanks to you all for this opportunity, it is a great honor to be speaking to you all today. Let me congratulate you all on the course of study you have chosen, because the rule of law is a fundamental pillar of any strong democracy. The knowledge, experience, and integrity of a nation's judicial and legal systems are vital to every aspect of its functioning. You each will have an important role in Paraguay's future, I wish you the very best.

Can I ask how many of you have been to the U.S. Embassy?

How many have been to the United States?

And finally, how many have met a U.S ambassador before today?

U.S. ambassadors come in all different types, and Paraguay has seen some interesting ones across the history of our friendship. In the early years there was Charles Washburn, here for seven years during the War of the Triple Alliance --- he was accused by Mariscal Lopez of trying to overthrow the government in the midst of the fighting. Or Martin T. McMahon, who replaced Washburn and remained a steadfast ally to Paraguay through the end of the Triple Alliance War. There have been colorful diplomats, to be sure: Findley Howard, our Ambassador in the 19xx started drinking pink gin in the morning, and after noon turned to drinking scotch and only ate imported cans of beef tongue. But eccentricities aside, lately we've had very qualified ambassadors including Robert White, a renowned defender of human rights, and Liliana Ayalde, who is currently our ambassador in Brazil. My predecessor, Jim Thessin, is a distinguished international law expert. I am the 45th US envoy accredited to Paraguay, and the 26th ambassador.

This is a wonderful time in our partnership with Paraguay, and I am grateful for the chance to share with you where we are, and where we are going. At this point let me just mention that we are showing on the screen here a series of photos representing our collaboration with Paraguay through Peace Corps, USAID, our military colleagues, our law enforcement teams, our Department of Treasury partners, and many other official U.S. government agencies that have programs here. If you get bored during my presentation, please just enjoy the slide show.

About 16 months ago I presented my credentials to President Cartes, the official act that allows an ambassador to begin working in a new country. In that conversation we agreed that the friendship between our two nations was based on shared values, mutual esteem, and respect. That foundation exists not just between our two governments, but also across the many other ways our countries

connect – through business and civic ties, by university exchanges, via the arts and media, and of course between our citizens as well – directly or via WhatsApp. But of course, we aren't looking only at one another. Together we're looking at a new world in a young century, more dynamic than ever before, with emerging innovations that bring opportunity but also challenge, and with new transnational risks that we need to manage together and with other partners. I will talk today about how our bilateral relations are progressing, and then move on to how we cooperate internationally.

Let me remind you that I mentioned the foundation of our friendship is rooted in shared values, mutual esteem, and respect. That means that the United States does not impose programs, projects or initiatives on Paraguay. It means we identify the objectives Paraguay has established for itself, and seek opportunities to support them the best we can. Today we use Paraguay's National Development Plan and its "Vision by 2030." This plan was developed through extensive consultations across all sectors of Paraguayan society – these are our signposts. This exciting set of ambitions offers Paraguay the opportunity to strengthen its democracy, open its economy, protect its resources, and integrate more actively with the global community. To summarize there are three key goals – reduce poverty and expand social development; grow an inclusive economy, and increase Paraguay's engagement in the world. To get there, Paraguay plans to provide efficient and transparent public management and services, to ensure equal opportunity, to normalize land use and territorial development; and to support environmental sustainability. Paraguayans across all sectors share the leading role in realizing this ambitious vision. We are in a supporting and facilitating role, where invited, and where we can offer some technical assistance or share some hard-won experience that may be useful to Paraguay.

Our most valuable contribution has perhaps been in the push for transparency, an important and irreversible point of progress for Paraguayan democracy. USAID, working with Paraguayan non-governmental organizations, helped draft implementing regulations for freedom of information legislation and helped set up the internet portal where government agencies now post all the required information. Working with appropriate counterparts, we supported merit-based hiring and evaluation processes, professional training and development, and clear career paths for civil servants. Because transparency inevitably exposes corruption, we helped SENAC develop the recently signed anti-corruption plan. This plan offers a guidebook for future efforts to improve governance and citizen services. The business sector is also leading efforts to reject contraband products, protect intellectual property rights, embrace ethical pacts and promote corporate social responsibility. It's when all sectors pull together like this that you can expect to see real, positive and lasting change across society.

We have other programs designed to help the government do its job better. We are helping the Supreme Court set up electronic case tracking systems to maximize efficiencies in the handling of judicial files. We have five teams working with the Central Bank and the Finance Ministry to help with budget preparations and taxation, preparations for public-private partnerships, fiscal inclusion, tackling financial crimes, and electronic financial transfers. We offer professional training to police, public prosecutors, the military, prison guards and judges to improve citizen security. On any given day we have some kind of activity happening in Asuncion – and at least once a month in the areas outside the capital.

Paraguay's second priority for reaching its Vision 2030 goals is to promote equal opportunity and inclusivity. To support that, we work with youth leaders to teach them English, motivate them to do projects in their communities, empower them to realize they can make a difference. We select the best among them to be our youth ambassadors, and send them to leadership training in the U.S. I meet them every year, and every year I am more impressed by the energy, creativity and contributions of Paraguay's youth. Our Peace Corps volunteers hold gender camps every year to help young men and women learn to respect one another and share opportunities equally. Our #SheRocks campaign matched rising young women leaders with Paraguay's most inspiring women role models – like Berta Rojas and Tana Schembori. We have exchange programs for indigenous leaders as well, who meet with counterparts from all over the region to share both their cultures and their dreams. Finally, we have worked with the Saraki Foundation to bring differently-abled Paraguayans to the stage, to the fashion runway, and to the workplace. We engage with human rights experts, religious leaders and members of the LGBT community to understand their important perspectives. Creating opportunities for those who are different enriches the experience for everyone.

Paraguay's third priority is protecting the environment while growing the economy. These are two goals often seen as conflicting, but think again! Working with multiple government and agricultural partners we formed a coalition committed to supporting growth in agriculture while protecting the forests, wildlife, and plants that make Paraguay such a uniquely beautiful place. Working with A Todo Pulmon we've helped reforest the Rio Monday basin. Partnering with Bancoop we can extend small credit lines to farm producers willing to protect the environment. USAID programs also support small farmers and cooperatives in the north of the country, many of them women, looking to sustain their family on the income from just a few cows.

But the work the Embassy does is greatly multiplied by what our friends and partners in Paraguay do to reinforce progress toward the Vision 2030 goals. The CCPA helps us out by teaching English, sharing American culture, running a fantastic jazz quartet, and moving the library into the 21st century by opening a state-of-the-art computer lab. Our American Chamber of Commerce friends model ideal workplace conditions, promote social responsibility programs, and lead the way to promote ethical conduct across the business sector. For many years Paraguay has had a special relationship with Kansas, and I went there a month ago to meet with over 80 Paraguayan students studying in two different universities there. They missed terere and the warm weather, but they were excited to graduate and return to Paraguay to help build the future. This year we added a new education partnership with West Virginia University to include three full scholarships for Paraguayan students. And thanks to a new partnership between the Carlos Antonio Lopez scholarship program and our Fulbright graduate program, we'll be able to send 15 more students to the U.S. for graduate study in the coming year.

Paraguayans studying abroad is one aspect of the last major goal of Vision 2030 – connecting Paraguay more closely to the rest of the world. Just in the 16 months I've been here, the government of Paraguay has played a leading role in Mercosur, in UNASUR, in the United National Human Rights Council, and in UN peacekeeping missions. Paraguay has expanded exports to new products in multiple new markets – including shipping live cattle to Ecuador. Five new American brands are already in Paraguay this year –

and in a few weeks we'll add Forever 21 and a number of other franchises. From the OAS General Assembly to the Pope to the Dakar Rally – the world is coming to Paraguay, and Paraguay is ready.

Being connected to the world means Paraguay can excel in robotics competitions, see its artists hired by Pixar and recognized at the Academy Awards, see its athletes excel in world sports, and see “7 Cajas” win rave reviews across the globe. Paraguay can do its part to help us all confront climate change – most immediately by ratifying the Paris COP 21 agreement which President Cartes signed just last month

. But greater connectivity to the world also demands greater attention to cross-border risks, including illicit trafficking in persons, narcotics, weapons and contraband. Criminal organizations ignore boundaries, laws and human rights – and we need to work together to confront them. Corruption is also a cross-border crime, and this is a good time for me to highlight Paraguay's excellent cooperation with the ongoing investigation into alleged abuses by the leaders of FIFA. We also need to work together to mitigate natural disasters, pandemics and the impacts of climate change. I am glad to say that Paraguay is an effective partner in developing the opportunities of the global community, as well as in managing the risks.

I told you at the beginning that I am excited to be in Paraguay at this time in history. That's because of all of you. Ultimately, whether Paraguay reaches its 2030 vision is not up to your government or mine. It is up to you build the Paraguay that you want your children to inherit. It is up to you to insist on reforms, to implement the changes, to demand on good governance, and to exercise the responsibilities you have as active, engaged citizens of a proud democracy. You are the majority in Paraguay today, and therefore should have an important voice – but only if you choose to use it. I have met young Paraguayan leaders in Concepcion and Filadelfia, in Pedro Juan Caballero and Ciudad del Este; in Encarnacion and of course in Asuncion. Without exception they are inspirational. You are inspirational. You have so much potential, so much to contribute, and with your leadership I am confident Paraguay will meet and exceed those 2030 goals.

President Rutherford B. Hayes helped create the US-Paraguay friendship with his famous laudo of 1878. Let me close with a quote from him: “Las iniciativas audaces son las exitosas. Presta atención a las esperanzas y no a los miedos, para ganar en este emprendimiento.”

Thank you very much.